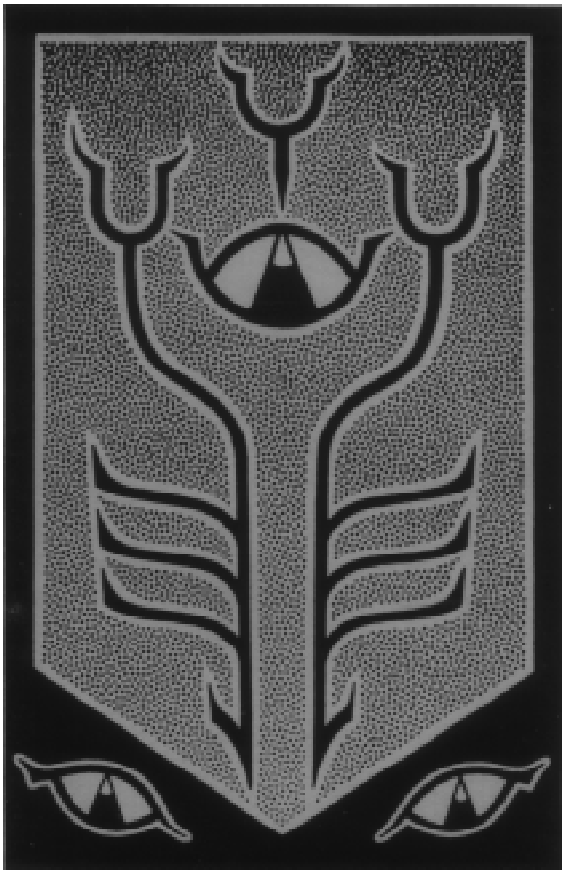
Cults of Cthulhu



H.P Lovecraft and the Occult Tradition

Fra. Tenebrous

Cults of Cthulhu
H.P Lovecraft and the Occult Tradition
by Fra. Tenebrous

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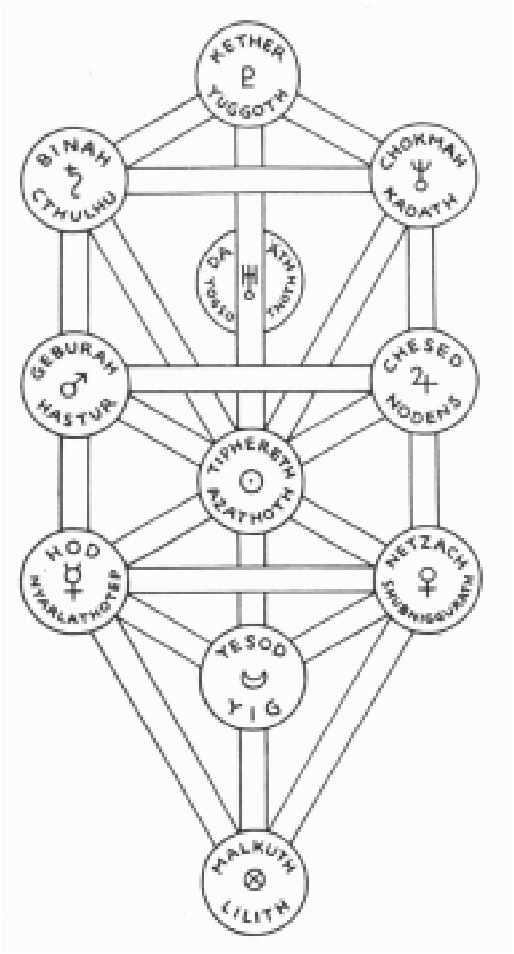
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AZATHOTH
HOD
NYARLATHOTEP
NETZACH
SHUB-NIGGURATH
YESOD
YIG
MALKUTH
LILITH

H.P LOVECRAFT

"That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die."

H. P. Lovecraft, 'The Nameless City', 1921

In the 1920's, an American magazine of fantasy and horror fiction called *Weird Tales* began to publish stories by a then-unknown author named H. P. Lovecraft. As his contributions to the magazine grew more regular, the stories began to form an internally consistent and self-referential mythology, created from the literary realisation of the author's dreams and intuitive impulses. Although he outwardly espoused a wholly rational and sceptical view of the universe, his dream-world experiences allowed him glimpses of places and entities beyond the world of mundane reality, and behind his stilted and often excessive prose there lies a vision and an understanding of occult forces which is directly relevant to the Magical Tradition.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island, at 454 Angell Street — the house of his maternal grandfather, Whipple V. Phillips. His parents, Winfield Scott Lovecraft and Sarah Susan Phillips, were of English descent, and throughout his life Lovecraft remained a devoted Anglophile. Winfield Lovecraft, a commercial traveller, spent much of his time away from the family home, and as a result had little influence on the young Lovecraft. Three years after his son's birth, he was admitted to a

psychiatric hospital, where he died in 1898 of' general paralysis of the insane', the final stage of syphilis. As a result, Lovecraft spent the remainder of his formative years under the guidance of his mother and two maiden aunts, who shielded him completely from the rigours and demands of everyday life, whilst at the same time tormenting him because of his supposed ugliness.

Lovecraft soon began to show signs of being 'different' — he could read fluently at the age of four, and would spend hours in his grandfather's extensive library, studying volumes of history and mythology. His grandfather also introduced him to local folk tales and myths which he would later draw upon in his evocations of the imaginary New England landscapes of Arkham, Dunwich and Innsmouth.

He began his formal studies at Hope High School, Providence, but was largely self-educated due to an unstable constitution, which lead to long periods of absence from school. He preferred the company of adults to that of other children, who disliked him because of his delicate nature and precocious intelligence. Instead of joining their juvenile games, he developed his own, interior world of the imagination through writing, and at the age of 15 produced his first horror story, 'The Beast in the Cave' By 1914, he had submitted a series of articles to the United Amateur Press Association and to local newspapers, ranging in content from astronomy and philosophy, to his early stories of the occult and the supernatural. Also at this time, he began the epistolary communications which were to become one of the main pleasures of his life. (At one time, Lovecraft had over a hundred regular correspondents, and in fact, his extant letters considerably outweigh his fiction - one estimate puts the total number of letters written by Lovecraft at over 100,000.)

However, it was not until 1917 that Lovecraft seriously considered writing in earnest. The family had been forced to leave the house in Angell Street due to financial difficulties, and Lovecraft soon discovered that he was incapable of earning a living. (Indeed, he was to spend the best part of his life in a state of financial deprivation and semi-starvation, surviving on as little as 15 dollars a week.) His mother's mental and physical condition declined rapidly, and in 1919 she entered the Butler Hospital, where she died in May, 1921 after a protracted illness.

Lovecraft's short story, 'Dagon', written in 1917, was published by *Weird Tales* in October, 1923, flue year of the magazine's appearance. In the same year, he made his first trip to New York to visit with the poet Samuel Loveman, and also to meet with Sonia H. Greene, a fellow member of the Amateur Press Association. Lovecraft had been corresponding with Sonia, a woman several years his elder, since 1921, and had also worked on revisions of some of her own writings. Following their meeting, their friendship deepened and they were married on March 3, 1924. This new life proved too much for Lovecraft, however, and they separated after only two years. Lovecraft found the urban metropolis of New York unbearable, and his feelings of revulsion for the city provided the inspiration for his story, The Horror at Red Hook'. After the break up of his marriage, Lovecraft returned to Providence, where he lived as a semi-recluse in the house of his surviving aunt, Anne Phillips Gamwell. With the exception of expeditions of antiquarian exploration to various parts of the country (including visits to Boston, Quebec, New Orleans and Philadelphia), and short trips to examine historical sites within New England (such as the prehistoric megaliths at Shutesbury, Massachusetts), he was to remain in Providence for the rest of his life.

Following his return to the city of his birth, Lovecraft concentrated exclusively on writing, working through the night and sleeping during the day, his shutters closed. Embarking upon long nocturnal ramblings, he would visit the scenes of his childhood where he had composed his first stories, and which held a deep, nostalgic fascination for the adult writer. In the winter, he seldom left the confines of the house due to a pathological horror of temperatures below 70°F — there is one anecdote which tells of the time that he ventured out when the temperature read 30°F, and immediately collapsed needing medical resuscitation. He displayed a marked aversion to the sea, suffered from terrible headaches, and physically showed signs of under-nourishment.

He was also subject to particularly vivid and lucid dreams, suffering from nightmares virtually every other night of his life. During his childhood, he was visited in dream by creatures which he called 'the Night Gaunts'. These faceless, bat-winged apparitions would carry him away to bizarre scenes of towering, pointed mountain tops — an archetypal landscape which was to find expression in his fiction as 'the abominable plateau of Leng'. And it was during such nocturnal experiences that many of his most powerful images originated — often transferred to paper in an manner virtually identical to that of 'automatic writing', as was the case in the transcription of his prose-poem, 'Nyarlathotep'. In a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, dated December 4, 1921, he writes,

> *"Nyarlathotep* is a nightmare — an actual phantasm of my own, with the first paragraph written *before I fully awaked.* I have been feeling execrably of late — whole weeks have passed without relief from headache and dizziness, and for a long time three hours was my utmost

limit for continuous work ... Added to my steady ills was an unaccustomed ocular trouble which prevented me from reading fine print — a curious tugging of nerves and muscles which rather startled me during the weeks it persisted. Amidst this gloom came the nightmare of nightmares — the most realistic and horrible I have experienced since the age often — whose stark hideousness and ghastly oppressiveness I could but feebly mirror in my written phantasy...

As I was drawn into the abyss I emitted a resounding shriek ... and the picture ceased. I was in great pain — forehead pounding and ears ringing — but I had only one automatic impulse — to *write,* and preserve the atmosphere of unparalleled fright; and before I knew it I had pulled on the light and was scribbling desperately. Of what I was writing I had very little idea, and after a time I desisted and bathed my head. When fully awake I remembered all the incidents but had lost the exquisite thrill of fear — the actual sensation of the presence of the hideous unknown. Looking at what I had written I was astonished by its coherence. It comprises the first paragraph of the enclosed manuscript, only three words having been changed."[1]

Lovecraft is a particularly interesting case of the transmission of 'occult knowledge' via dream, in that he was one of the few authors to write effectively on the supernatural without conscious belief in the material which he was conveying. On the contrary, he violently denied the possibility of the existence of occult phenomena, though he was willing to employ their manifestation as a fictional device. Nevertheless, this intellectual denial, expressed in his letters and in conversations with friends, is belied by the subjective certainty with which he wrote of such matters, as evidenced in his fiction —

indicating a dynamic dichotomy between the rational and intuitive aspects of his psychology.

With the appearance of subsequent stories, an underlying pattern began to appear in Lovecraft's work. In the central theme of 'The Call of Cthulhu', written in 1926, this design is clearly revealed. The subject of the story is the suggestion that, at certain times when the conjunctions of the stars assume the correct aspect, certain dark forces can influence sensitive individuals, giving them visions of 'the Great Old Ones', god-like aliens of extraterrestrial origin. These entities exist in another dimension, or on a different vibrational level, and can only enter this universe though specific 'window areas' or psychic gateways - a concept fundamental to many occult traditions. Cthulhu is the High Priest of the Old Ones, entombed in the sunken city of R'lyeh, where he awaits the time of their return. He is described as a winged, tentacled anthropoid of immense size, formed from a semi-viscous substance which recombines after his apparent destruction at the conclusion of the tale. The narrative also gives evidence, drawn from various archaeological and mythological sources, of the continuing existence of a cult dedicated to the return of the Old Ones, its exponents ranging from inhabitants of the South Seas Islands to the *angakoks* of Greenland, and practitioners of voodoo in the Southern United States.

Lovecraft also gives a brief description of the world after its re-inheritance by the Great Old Ones:

> "The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling injoy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout

and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom."[2]

There is a marked similarity between this passage and the teachings of many actual secret societies of the past, including the Assassins, the Gnostics, and the Templars, but in particular to the 'Law of Thelema', as expounded by Lovecraft's contemporary, Aleister Crowley. The main distinction is one of moral interpretation — whereas Lovecraft regarded his ancient gods as essentially evil, Crowley saw the return of such atavistic deities as being in full accord with 'the progression of the Aeons".

Following 'The Call of Cthulhu', Lovecraft produced a series of a dozen or more stories which contain the central core of the inter-related mythology which later became known as 'the Cthulhu Mythos'. In these stories, he describes various rites — surviving on earth since the primordial reign of the Old Ones, and preserved in more recent times in esoteric grimoires such as the *Necronomicon* — through which the evocation of the alien gods could be effected. In 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward', he suggests that the very roots of the magical arts lie in the ritual veneration of these trans-dimensional beings, attributing a common and unifying source to the many and diverse strands of occult belief. Over the centuries, these ceremonies have been observed and mis-interpreted in terms of black magic and devil worship.

A point to note here is that Lovecraft never actually used the term 'Cthulhu Mythos, which was introduced after his death by his protege, August Derleth. Cthulhu is only one of a pantheon of deities which includes Yog-Sothoth, Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, and ShubNiggurath, amongst others. The manifestations of these beings varies from story to story —

sometimes they are described as purely supernatural, while at other times they appear as extraterrestrials with concrete physical existence — and sometimes, a particular deity may be referred to in both ways within the same text. By comparing the references to each of these deities in the Mythos stories, it is possible to reconstruct their inter-relationship in terms of a hierarchy, and to examine the correspondences between Lovecraft's imaginary pantheon and those of pre-existing religious and mythological systems.

Basically, the gods of the Cthulhu Mythos fall into two groups, the Great Old Ones and the Elder Gods, though of the latter, only Nodens is mentioned by name. Between Ultimate Chaos and the Physical World stand Yog-Sothoth and Azathoth, who share dominion over the lesser deities, pre-human races, and mankind.

Yog-Sothoth is the outer manifestation of the Primal Chaos, the gate though which those outside must enter. In 'The Dunwich Horror', Lovecraft writes,

> "The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but *between* them, They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. *Yog-Sothoth* knows the gate. *Yog-Sothoth* is the gate. *Yag-Sothoth* is the key and the guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in *Yog-Sothoth.* He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again."

His order of existence parallels the concept of the universe as exposited in Hindu and Oriental mysticism, 'an All-in-One and One-in-All of limitless being and self. As such, a particular physical from cannot be ascribed to Yog-Sothoth, though in

'The Dunwich Horror', the offspring of his mating with Lavinia Whateley is compared to an octopus, centipede or spider. The formula of evocation of Yog-Sothoth is given in 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward', wherein it forms part of the necromantic workings of the sorcerer, Joseph Curwen.

The British occultist Kenneth Grant has described Yog-Sothoth as embodying "'the supreme and ultimate blasphemy in the form of the Aeon *(yog* or *yuga)* of *Set* (Sothoth = Set + Thoth)"[4]. On the qabbalistic Tree of Life, Yog-Sothoth can be attributed to Da'ath, the eleventh (or 'non') sephirah, where the identification is with Choronzon, the Guardian of the Abyss whom Crowley called "the first and deadliest of the powers of evil", and whose number is 333, that of Chaos and Dispersion.

Elementally, Yog-Sothoth can be considered as the positive manifestation of Fire; magically, to active Spirit, his cardinal station being the immediate South.

Reigning over the universe is Azathoth,

> "the blind idiot god ... the Lord of All Things. encircled by his horde of mindless and amorphous dancers, and lulled by the thin monotonous piping of a demoniac flute held in nameless paws."[5]

Whereas Yog-Sothoth embraces the expanse of infinity, Azathoth represents the opposing principle in that he rules at the heart of Chaos, the central point of a universe permeated by the influence of Yog-Sothoth. Their relationship could be stated as the reconciliation of infinite expansion and infinite contraction. In physical terms, Azathoth manifests as the vast destructive energy inherent in the atomic particle, which is unleashed via nuclear fusion. He is the antithesis of creation,

the ultimately negative aspect of Elemental Fire. Magically, his attribution is to passive Spirit.

Subservient to 'the idiot god' is a group referred to as 'the Other Gods' —the amorphous dancers who attend Azathoth at the throne of Chaos. Their soul and messenger is Nyarlathotep, 'the Crawling Chaos', who mediates between the Old Ones and their human followers. His avatar manifests as a human figure dressed in black, with jet black skin but Caucasian features. In this form he is recognisable as 'the Black Man of the Witches' Sabbath' — an incarnation commonly associated with Satan. He is depicted in seventeenth century tracts on witchcraft as a creature with ebony skin, the long black robe of a priest, and a conical hat — a description substantiated by the testimonies of individuals in both Europe and Lovecraft's own New England.

Nyarlathotep's physical appearance also compares quite strikingly to that of the astral entity, Aiwaz, who communicated the text known as *The Book of the Law* to Aleister Crowley in Cairo, 1904, thus inaugurating the present Aeon of Horus. Crowley describes Aiwaz as,

> "A tall dark man in his thirties, with the face of a savage king, and eyes veiled lest their gaze should destroy what they saw."

According to Grant, the Cult of Aiwaz "can be traced to a period that inspired the age-long Draconian Tradition of Egypt, which lingered on into the dark dynasties, the monuments of which were laid waste by opponents of the elder cult." It is interesting to note that Lovecraft himself specifically linked the worship of Nyarlathotep to 'pre-dynastic Egypt', in the eponymously titled prose poem.

The elemental aspect of Nyarlathotep is Aether, the communicating medium of interstellar space (or in Lovecraft's terminology, 'The Audient Void').

Shub-Niggurath is 'the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young' — a title inferring the geometric proliferation of creatures upon the Earth. He is the Horned God of the pagan agricultural societies of the ancient world, representing fertility and sexual energy. In Greek mythology his archetype is Pan, half-man and half-goat. As Christianity began to replace paganism, the Pan-image became the prototype for the Christian devil, and was associated with the practise of Satanism, though the worship of the Horned God had pre-dated Christianity by at least a thousand years.

In 1919, Aleister Crowley published a poem entitled 'A Hymn to Pan', in which he evoked this current of sexual energy as it pertains to ceremonial magic, and which he often

incorporated into his own magical workings. The exclamation, 'Io Pan!', which concludes the poem, corresponds to the cry of 'Ai! Shub-Niggurath', which occurs in several of Lovecraft's stories in relation to the worship of the goat-god. This similarity raises the question of Lovecraft's familiarity with Crowley's work — he could have seen a copy of *The Equinox,* the volume of collected essays in which-the 'Hymn to Pan' first appeared, in the Widener Library at Harvard, which obtained a copy in December 1917. However, from passing references to Crowley in one of Lovecraft's letters, identifying him with a character in a story by H. R. Wakefield[6], it would appear unlikely that Lovecraft knew much of 'the Great Beast', except by reputation.

The elemental nature of Shub-Niggurath is that of Earth, symbolized by the sign of Taurus. His station is the North.

Hastur is 'the voice of the Old Ones' — an elemental deity

assigned to the Air, or the void of outer space. On earth, the station of Hastur is the East, and his sign is Aquarius.

The god Dagon was appropriated by Lovecraft from ancient Hebraic texts, in which he features as a god of the Philistines. In the Mythos, he is the Progenitor of the Seas, the watery equivalent to Shub-Niggurath and Lord of the amphibious Deep Ones. His elemental attribution is Water, and his number is 777.

Cthulhu himself is referred to as 'the High Priest of the Great Old Ones'. His other titles include, 'He Who is to Come', 'Lord of R'lyeh', and 'Lord of the Watery Abyss'. Cthulhu is the initiator of the dream-visions sent forth to mankind from the tomb-city of R'lyeh. The formula of his invocation is supplied by Lovecraft in the curious ritual phrase, of non-human origin, which is chanted by the worshippers of the Cthulhu cult:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Cthulhu represents the Abyss of the subconscious or dreaming mind, and astrologically by the sign of Scorpio. Ceremonially, he is referred to the West (Amenta, or the Place of the Dead in ancient Egyptian religion), and geographically, to the site of R'lyeh in the South Pacific (the exact coordinates for which are to be found in 'The Call of Cthulhu'.)

As already stated, Nodens is the only member of the Elder Gods to be mentioned by name, and Lovecraft gives no further information concerning him. The sign of the Elder Gods is described as an upright pentagram containing an eye-shaped sigil. The points of the pentagram symbolize the four elements, plus that of Spirit, the fifth or 'hidden' element. Combined, they balance the mono-elemental nature of the Old Ones, suggesting that the Elder Gods may exist on a higher plane

The ‘eye’ suggests the opening if the Ajana Chakra, or Third Eye, symbolizing the facility of astral vision.

In one sense, the beings described above are designated ‘gods’ in as much as they are worshipped by great numbers of other beings, both human and non-human. Amongst these are ‘the Elder Races’, who inhabited the Earth in prehistoric times, and from whose presence man’s very existence derives.

The first of these races to visit the Earth was ‘the Old Ones’, who came down from the stars to build their black stone city on the continent of Antarctica. They are described as having starfish-shaped heads, and tubular bodies covered with tentacles and cilia. Their servants are the mindless, protoplasmic ‘Shoggoths’. In the novel, *At the Mountains of Madness,* Lovecraft records the wars which took place between the Old Ones and other extra-terrestrial races, at the dawn of time. These other groups include the Spawn of Cthulhu, winged cephalopods who constructed the now-sunken city of R’lyeh.

The Deep Ones, described by Lovecraft in *The Shadow over Innsmouth,* are the semi-humanoid, aquatic servitors of Dagon. At certain times in the past, they have ventured onto land and mated with humans, producing a degenerate offspring who can be recognised by icthyoid physical characteristics known as ‘the Innsmouth Look’, after the New England seaport whose inhabitants had interbred with the Deep Ones.

‘The Whisperer In Darkness’ details a third group of non-human entities, which originate from the planet Yuggoth (or Pluto). They are crab-like creatures, fungoid in substance, which Lovecraft links with the Mi-Go, or Abominable Snowman, of the Himalayas.

The last type which Lovecraft was to describe in detail is ‘the Great Race’, which occupied the continent of Australia some 150,000 years ago. Unlike the other races mentioned

above, it seems that this group may have been indigenous to the Earth. Physically, they were cone shaped beings, the head and organs attached to extendable limbs spreading out from their apexes. According to the story, 'The Shadow Out of Time', the Great Race were able to effect mind transference with any living being, and had accumulated a vast collection of information on the various cultures that exist in the universe.

This completes the pantheon of non-human entities. In turn, the worship of the Great Old Ones is continued on earth by secret societies whose traditions and rituals preserve the hidden knowledge of these Elder Races. Lovecraft documents three such cults, 'the Cult of Cthulhu', 'the Esoteric Order of Dagon', centred in Innsmouth (actually Newburyport, Massachusetts), and 'the Starry Wisdom Sect'. In The Haunter of the Dark', Lovecraft describes how the latter sect held meetings in a church in Providence, where it communed with an avatar of Nyarlathotep via a magical object known as 'the Shining Trapezohedron.

The name, 'Starry Wisdom', recalls that of Crowley's 'Argentum Astrum', or Order of the Silver Star, founded in 1907. The 'Silver Star' represents Sirius, from which emanates the magical culTent represented on Earth by the entity, Aiwaz.

Another contemporary of Lovecraft's whose writings contain many similarities and correspondences is Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the famous occultist and theosophist and author of *The Secret Doctrine,* This vast work is in fact an expanded commentary on *The Book of Dzyan* , itself a fragmentary extract from the 'Mani Koumbourm', the sacred writings of the Dzugarians, an ancient race which inhabited the mountain regions of northern Tibet. These texts tell of how the earth was once possessed by chaotic beings said to have crossed the gulf from another universe, at a time pre-dating the appearance

of man, and goes on to relate how they were expelled from this universe by the intervention of forces allied to the cause of Order. This cosmic history, which details subsequent battles with other primal life forms, shows an obvious parallel with that described within the Cthulhu Mythos.

In a letter dated March 25, 1933, Lovecraft writes,

> "only the other day my New Orleans friend E. Hoffman Price ... discovered an intensely picturesque myth-cycle dealing with the earth's early aeons, the lost continent of Kusha (Atlantis) and Shalmali (Lemuria), & the peopling of the earth from elder planets. There is talk of a secret book in some Eastern shrine, parts of which are older than the earth ... Price assures me it is actual folklore & promises to send further particulars."[7]

And in another letter[8], Lovecraft reveals the identity of the secret book as being *The Book of Dzyan,* and identifies the Eastern shrine with 'Shamballah'.

Madame Blavatsky died on May 8, 1891, of Bright's disease — a condition from which Lovecraft also suffered, and which contributed to his early death.

One explanation of the many 'occult' correspondences found in Lovecraft's fiction has been supplied by Kenneth Grant in his 'Typhonian Trilogies'. Grant suggests that the Lovecraftian grimoire, the *Necronomicon,* actually exists within the Akasha, or field of Astral Light. This is an etheric reservoir said to surround the earth, and which retains within its structure the imprint of every event which has occurred since the formation of the planet. It can be accessed at will by those individuals who possess the necessary psychic ability, and may be manipulated to provide positive images. It was from the

Akashic records that Blavatsky transmitted *The Book of Dzayn,* and Crowley transcribed *The Book of the Cells of the Qliphoth* — could it be that Lovecraft may have subconsciously communicated *The Book of Dead Names* from the same source?

In his realisation of the Cthulhu Mythos, Lovecraft also drew upon a wide range of sources from the historical occult tradition, and from the literary material pertaining to it. In his essay, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', he mentions academic works such as Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* and Margaret Murray's *The Witch Cult in Western Europe,* as well as authentic grimoires such as *The Keys of Solomon* and Dr. John Dee's *Book of Enoch,* or 'Liber Logaeth'. He had also read Waite's collection of medieval texts, *The Book of Black Magic and Pacts,* MacGregor Mathers' translation of *The Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Sage,* and Cotton Mathers', *Wonders of the Invisible World,* which documents the witchcraft phenomena centred around Salem in 1692. The titles of these volumes are echoed in those which were created by Lovecraft and his fellow contributors to the Cthulhu Mythos: 'De Vermis Mysteriis', 'The Pnakotic Manuscripts', 'Les Cultes des Ghoules', and 'The Book of Eibon'.

However, the most important of these imaginary tomes is Lovecraft's own creation, the 'Al Azif of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, or, to employ its Latin name, the *Necronomicon.* This title, which occurred to Lovecraft during the course of a dream, translates as,

"NEKROS, corpse; NOMOS, law; EIKON, image -
An Image (or Picture) of the Law of the Dead."

In a brochure entitled, 'Chronology of the Necronomicon', published in 1936, Lovecraft gives a suggested history of the damned book. According to this essay, the original text was transcribed by the poet Alhazred at Damascus in 730 A.D. The title, 'Al Azif, refers to the nocturnal sounds made by insects, and supposed by Arabs to be the howling of demons. (By the numerology of the Qabbalah, its number is 129, which represents amongst other things, 'a place of ravenous creatures', and corresponds with the Egyptian word, 'Atem', 'to annihilate'.) Alhazred had spent ten years alone in the great southern desert of Arabia, the Roba-El-Ehaliyeh or 'Empty Space' of the ancients, which was rumoured to be inhabited by evil spirits. He had explored the ruins of Babylon and the subterranean tombs of Memphis, and visited the forbidden city of hem. Beneath the remains of a nameless desert town, he discovered the annals of a race older than mankind, which he set down in the Azif.

In 950 A.D., the book was secretly translated into Greek by Theodorus Philetas of Constantinople, under the title of the *Necronomicon,* and in 1228, Olaus Wormius made a Latin transcription. This text was printed twice, once in 15th century Germany, in black letter, and once in the 17th century, in Spanish. Shortly after its translation into Latin, the *Necronomicon* was banned by Pope Gregory IX, and there is said to have been no sight of the Greek copy since the burning of a library in Salem in 1692. A translation made by Dee was never printed, and exists only in fragments recovered from the original manuscript. Of the Latin texts now existing, one is supposed to be held by the British Museum, and the other by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. A 17th century copy is in the Widener Library collection at Harvard. Numerous other copies probably exist — the book being rigidly suppressed by the authorities of most countries, and by all branches of

organised religion.

The mention of Dee's name in connection with the *Necronomicon* is interesting in that he was one of the few magical adepts of the past who can present us with practical evidence of communication with non-human entities. Dr. John Dee was the astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I, and worked with a number of scryers, or seers, the most talented of which was the Irishman, Sir Edward Kelly. Through the use of a magic mirror of Mayan origin, Kelly made contact with certain spirits, who communicated through him a series of magical 'Calls', or Keys, in a language called 'Enochian'. This language has since been studied and analysed by many historians, who confirm that it is indeed an authentic and consistent idiom, without resemblance to any other still in existence. It is even more remarkable that, in recently deciphered passages from *The Book of Enoch,* words approximating to the names of the Great Old Ones, as they appear in the Cthulhu Mythos have been discovered.

From around 1930, Lovecraft periodically assured his correspondents that he was about to give up writing, but forced himself to continue to make the effort to produce new fiction. In 1935, a year after the completion of his final story, The Shadow Out of Time', he developed an illness which was finally diagnosed in 1937 as cancer of the intestines, by which time the disease has spread thought his trunk. He was admitted to the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital, where he died on March 15, 1937, aged 46. He was buried three days later, in the family plot at Swan Point Cemetery.

After his death, his friend and correspondent August Derleth formed the Arkham House imprint, with the original aim of saving Lovecraft's work from the obscurity of the pulp fiction magazines in which it had first appeared, and to bring it to the

attention of a wider audience. (During Lovecraft's lifetime, only one of his tales, *The Shadow over Innsmouth,* had appeared in book form, produced by an amateur publisher.) In 1939, Arkham House published the first collection of his stories, *The Outsider and Others.* Since then, many other writers have contributed to the growing annals of the Cthulhu Mythos, adding their own deities to the pantheon, and creating eldritch tomes to add to the list of blasphemous grimoires. These authors include many of Lovecraft's personal correspondents — Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, Frank Belknap Long, Robert Bloch and Derleth himself. More recently, elements of the Cthulhu Mythos have featured in the work of such writers as Cohn Wilson, Ramsey Campbell, and Brian Lumley.

The Mythos has also been adopted for practical use by a number of contemporary magical and occult groups and organizations. Anton La Vey, head of the California-based Church of Satan, published his *Satanic Rituals* in 1972, and devoted a whole chapter to 'The Metaphysics of Lovecraft', including detailed descriptions of two Lovecraftian rituals, 'The Ceremony of the Nine Angles' and 'The Call to Cthulhu'. These rituals were transcribed in the original language of the *Necronomicon,* and translated into English by LaVey's fellow Satanist, Michael Aquino[9].

Another group which employs Lovecratian elements in their workings is the Black Snake Cult, or 'La Couleuvre Noire', a voodoo coven which combines the rites of the left-hand path with archetypes from the Cthulhu Mythos. Its leader, Michael Bertiaux, is one of the chief adepts of the Ordo Templi Orientis Antiqua and its offshoot, the Monastery of the Seven Rays, and was initiated as a Voodoo-Gnostic master in Haiti in 1963. In his study of modern-day voodoo, *Cults of the Shadow,* Kenneth Grant describes a ritual practised by the cult with the

intention of making contact with the Deep Ones at a deserted lake in Wisconsin,

> "The Cult of the Deep Ones flourishes in an atmosphere of moisture and coldness, the exact opposite of the fire and heat generated by the initial ceremonies which include the lycanthropic rites that evoke the inhabitants of the lake. The participants at this stage actually immerse themselves in the ice-cold water where a transference of sex-magical energy occurs between priests and priestesses while in that element."[10]

Through the use of this magical rite, Bertiaux claims to have established contact with these creatures, which "assume an almost tangible substance".

Perhaps Lovecraft himself has left us with a rather unsatisfactory explanation of the true provenance of the Cthulhu Mythos. Certainly, it appears to hold a great value for those individuals currently practising 'the Black Arts'. In the words of Kenneth Grant, the present Outer Head of the O.T.O.,

> "Lovecraft's great contribution to the occult lay in his demonstration — indirect as it may have been — of the power so to control the dreaming mind that it is capable of projection into other dimensions, and of discovering that there are doors through which flow — in the form of inspiration, intuition and vision —the genuine current of creative magical consciousness."[11]

Lovecraft's occult experiences, disguised as fiction, reveal the intrusion of forces in complete sympathy with those archetypes and symbols brought through by Blavatsky and

Crowley, whilst in contact with astral entities 'from beyond'. He had become the receiver and transmitter of hidden knowledge, though in Lovecraft's case, the process was intuitive rather than conscious. The internal self-division thus engendered may have been the root cause of Lovecraft's mental and physical peculiarities; or it may have been that these very traits, which set him apart from the rest of society, made him the ideal focus for the channelling of these ultra-mundane forces.

Notes:

1 Letter no. 94, *Selected Letters Volume I,* H. P. Lovecraft. Arkham House, 1965.

2 'The Call of Cthulhu', *The Dunwich Horror and Others,* H. P. Lovecraft. Arkham House, 1963.

3 'The Dunwich Horror', *The Dunwich Horror and Others,* H. P. Lovecraft.

4 *Outside the Circles of Time,* Kenneth Grant, page 296. Muller, 1980.

5 'The Haunter of the Dark', *The Dunwich Horror and Others,* H. P. Lovecraft.

6 'He Cometh and He Passeth By', H. R. Wakefield.

7 Letter no. 610, to Miss Elizabeth Toldridge, *Selected Letters Volume IV.* Arkham House, 1976.

8 Letter no. 604, to Clark Ashton Smith, *Selected Letters Volume IV.*

9 *The Satanic Rituals,* Anton Szandor LaVey. Avon Books, 1972.

10 *Cults of the Shadow,* Kenneth Grant, page 189. Muller, 1975.

11 *Outside the Circles of Time,* Kenneth Grant, page 43.